

## The Better Relationship Series

### Welcome to the final instalment in the Better Relationships Series

We hope you've been able to implement new strategies in your relationship and are seeing positive results. These last tips look at the three top levels of the Sound Relationship House.

### Managing Conflict

One of the things we're sometimes, incorrectly, led to believe is that in good relationships you should be able to resolve conflicts. However, this is often not possible. According to John Gottman, almost 70% of all conflicts are NOT resolvable. So what can we do about this unsettling fact? Well, we have to learn to manage our differences, to manage our conflicts. Sometimes we won't be able to reach an agreement, but we still need to carry on having a good relationship.

Dr Gottman offers this list of 6 skills to help couples manage conflict and live happily ever after:

#### 1. Practice physiological self-soothing

Take a timeout when conflict arises. Go for a walk, take a bath, read a book, do whatever it takes to breathe, calm down, and return to a better frame of mind. How long is the perfect amount of time for a break? According to Dr Gottman, it's 20 minutes.

#### 2. Use a softened startup

It's true that conversations usually end on the same note they began, so start softly. Don't blame your partner. It's better to use I-statements (e.g. "I feel this way because..."). Describe what is happening and don't forget to be polite.

#### 3. Repair and de-escalate

Use scripted phrases like "Let me try again," or "I don't feel like you are understanding me right now," and "I'm sorry" to help de-escalate and begin making repair attempts.

#### 4. Listen to your partner's underlying feelings and dreams

Perpetual problems between you and your partner often conceal underlying feelings and dreams that aren't being communicated. So start by recognising what your dreams are and how you can communicate them more clearly to your partner. Second, become a better listener and seek to discover your partner's deepest feelings and dreams. The purpose of this skill is to truly understand who your partner is deep down inside, in order to accept influence and compromise together.



## Managing Conflict cont.

### 5. Accept influence

Recognise that your partner has good ideas and important opinions (shocker – your way isn't always the best way or the right way). Show respect for those opinions and find something you can learn from your partner. Take this questionnaire to see where you most need to improve when it comes to accepting influence. <https://www.gottman.com/blog/weekend-homework-assignment-do-you-and-your-partner-accept-each-others-influence/>

### 6. Compromise

Compromise is an art. What's Dr Gottman's advice? "Compromise never feels perfect. Everyone gains something and everyone loses something ... the important thing is feeling understood, respected, and honoured in your dreams." So work together with your partner to find common ground and compromise that will leave you both feeling valued, respected and supported.

If you practise these 6 skills from Dr Gottman, and learn to manage conflict in positive and healthy ways, a stable and happy relationship can be in your reach.

(Courtesy of: <https://www.gottman.com/blog/conflict-normal-natural-part-happily-ever/>)

## What to avoid at all costs!

There are also some ways of communicating to avoid like crazy in relationships. These will aggravate conflict, and if you get into the habit of using these generally, they can send a relationship into a downward spiral. Dr Gottman calls them the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and they're very important to know and understand.

They are:

- Criticism
- Contempt
- Stonewalling
- Defensiveness.



We strongly urge you to click on this link and learn more about these 4 ways of communicating that can potentially bring your relationship undone. Luckily, there are antidotes if you find they're already causing your relationship pain.

<https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-four-horsemen-recognizing-criticism-contempt-defensiveness-and-stonewalling/>

The last two levels of the Sound Relationship House focus on making life dreams come true and creating shared meaning. With a sound foundation from the other levels, there's no reason to delay investing in the future.

## Make Life Dreams Come True

Many Australian couples have the common dream together of owning their own home. But not all dreams have to be that big. The first step is to take the time to think about what your dreams are, and find out what your partner dreams of achieving. Just because it's not practical right now to tick them off the list, doesn't mean you shouldn't talk about it. It's nice to share your deepest dreams with a partner who can share in your excitement and get to know that part of you.

The second step is to work towards fulfilling some of their dreams. You might be surprised at how many you can actually achieve in the shorter term. "I always dreamed of visiting the Taj Mahal" or "I always wanted to be fit enough to run a half-marathon". These might be very do-able dreams. Working towards personal dreams is healthy for a relationship. So get to work on dreaming BIG, talking about your dreams together and discovering which ones might actually be shared. Have some fun deciding which ones you can make happen immediately, which ones you'd like to work towards in the short-term, and which ones you might like for the future. Couples who can make their dreams come true are the envy of others!

## Create Shared Meaning

Dr Gottman suggests that couples create shared meaning through the use of rituals, roles, goals and symbols. As you begin your life together, it will be important, and fun, to establish these things as a way to give purpose and meaning to your relationship.

Your rituals help you on the long road of relationships. It can be an annual ritual or something more frequent. Dr Gottman recommends rituals of connection to begin and end each day. You might also have weekly rituals like a Saturday hike or a Wednesday lunch. Building these in early will habituate your connection and tether you to one another and the relationship.

In addition to establishing rituals, new couples have an opportunity to explore roles, goals and symbols together. You might like to read more by clicking on this link: <https://www.gottman.com/blog/shared-meaning-is-key-to-a-successful-relationship/>

This brings us to the end of The Better Relationship Series. We hope you found these newsletters useful. If you'd like to delve deeper into this topic or you have any specific issues you would like to work through in your relationship, remember you can come in and talk with a qualified, independent counsellor for free through your company's Employee Assistance program (EAP). Just call 1300 364 277. All calls are confidential.

### For more information:

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